

Message Text

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PAGE 01 TUNIS 00158 01 OF 02 091738Z
ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01
INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02
SS-15 USIA-06 COME-00 EB-08 LAB-04 SIL-01 MCT-01
IO-13 AID-05 TRSE-00 ACDA-12 SSM-03 /116 W
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P 091608Z JAN 78
FM AMEMBASSY TUNIS
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 9503

INFO AMEMBASSY ALGIERS
AMEMBASSY BONN
AMEMBASSY CAIRO
AMEMBASSY LONDON
AMEMBASSY PARIS
AMEMBASSY RABAT
AMEMBASSY ROME
AMEMBASSY TRIPOLI

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 TUNIS 158

PARIS FOR LABATT

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: ELAB, PFOR, PGOV, TS
SUBJ: ACHOUR TELLS UGTT NATIONAL COUNCIL HE IS READY TO RESIGN
FROM PARTY POLITICAL BUREAU

1. SUMMARY. THREE-DAY MEETING OF GENTY IVCONFEDERATION OF
TUNISIAN WORKERS (UGTT) OPENED IN UNION-OWNED AMILCAR
HOTEL IN TUNIS SUBURBS MORNING OF DECEMBER 8 GIVING
SUBSTANCE TO SPECULATION MEETING MIGHT BE A WATERSHED IN
CONFEDERATION'S RELATIONSHIP WITH GOVERNMENT AND RULING
DESTOURIAN SOCIALIST PARTY (PSD). PAROICIPANTS REPORTEDLY
CALL FOR CLARIFICATION ON CONFEDERATION'S RELATIONSHIP
WITH PARRTY AND ACHOUR RESPONDS HE IS READY TO RESIGN FROM
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PAGE 02 TUNIS 00158 01 OF 02 091738Z

PSD POLITICAL BUREAU. END SUMMARY.

2. UGTT COMMUNIQUE ISSUED AT CLOSE OF COUNCIL'S FIRST
DAY MEETING IN WHICH MORE THAN 7/00 UNION OFFICIALS PARTI-
CIPATED, OPENED WITH DIRECT ATTACK ON GOVERNMENT FOR
REFUSAL TO CONSIDER WORKERS' JUST DEM JRDU COMMUNIQUE NOTES
THAT PLO CENTRAL COMMITTEE MEMBER, ABOU IYAD, DURING

RECENT VISIT TO TUNISIA OFFERED TO MEDIATE IN LABOR DISPUTES INVOLVING ELEVEN "LARGE NATIONAL ENTERPRISES." COMMUNIQUE CONTINUES THAT TUNISIAN GOVERNMENT REJECTED ABOUT IYAD'S GOOD OFFICES BECAUSE IT VIEWED COSTS OF LABOR'S DEMANDS AS EXCESSIVE, THUS BLOCKING POSSIBILITIES FOR "ANY ACCORD." THIS, COMMUNIQUE EXPLAINS, IS CAUSE FOR RECENT SOCIAL AND POLITICAL TENSIONS.

3. COMMUNIQUE NOTES THAT UGTT SECRETARY GENERAL HABIB ACHOUR, IN HIS ADDRESS TO COUNCIL, REJECTED CATEGORICALLY ALLEGATIONS THAT UGTT IS "THIRSTING FOR POWER." HE IS QUOTED AS SAYING "CONTRARY TO WHAT IS PRETENDED BY CERTAIN PERSONS WHO SEE INCREASED STRENGTH OF UGTT AS DANGER TO THEIR OWN INTERESTS, UGTT SEEKS ONLY TO GUARANTEE UNION LIBERTIES, WHICH IS IN INTEREST NOT ONLY OF THE WORKERS BUT OF WHOLE COUNTRY." TOWARDS THIS GOAL, ACHOUR EXPLAINED, UGTT RECENTLY HAS REACHED AGREEMENT WITH LIBYAN LABOR CONFEDERATION FOR ESTABLISHMENT OF UGTT CELLS REPRESENTING TUNISIAN WORKERS IN LIBYA. SIMILAR ACCORDS ARE ALSO ENVISAGED WITH UNIONS IN OTHER COUNTRIES, NOTABLY IN GERMANY (FRG) AND IN FRANCE, ACHOUR ADDED.

4. COMMUNIQUE NOTES THAT MORE THAN A HUNDRED DELEGATES ASKED TO SPEAK BEFORE COUNCIL AND THAT PRINCIPAL SUBJECTS TO BE ADDRESSED ARE "REAL CAUSES" OF TENSION BETWEEN UGTT AND GOVERNMENT PARTY, FUTURE OF UGTT RELATIONS
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PAGE 03 TUNIS 00158 01 OF 02 091738Z

WITH GOVERNMENT AND PARTY, WAGE AND PRICE ISSUES, NEED TO ORGANIZE "TRULY FREE AND DEMOCRATIC ELECTIONS," AND DEFICIENCIES OF TUNISIAN RADIO/TV AND GOT PRESS AGENCY.

5. COMMUNIQUE CLOSES BY RECOUNTING ACHOUR'S RESPONSE TO "INCESSANT APPEALS" FROM PARTICIPANTS FOR CLARIFICATION ON UGTT-PARTY RELATIONSHIP. ACHOUR IS QUOTED AS STATING, "I AM READY TO RESIGN FROM PARTY POLITICAL BUREAU AS ALL DELEGATES THAT HAVE SPOKEN UP TO NOW HAVE DEMANDED. NEVERTHELESS, THIS CANNOT BE LOOKED UPON AS A HOSTILE ACT TOWARDS THE PARTY, AS WE MUST NOT FORGET THAT THE PARTY AND THE UGTT FOUGHT TOGETHER FOR THE COUNTRY'S LIBERATION. WE SHALL CONTINUE TO RESPECT THOSE WHO RESPECT US, WHETHER THIS BE THE PARTY OR ANY OTHER POLITICAL CURRENT THAT TRULY WORKS FOR THE GOOD OF THE COUNTRY." HE CONCLUDED BY STATING THAT UGTT REMAINS FREE TO ACT BOTH INSIDE AS WELL AS OUTSIDE OF THE COUNTRY, THAT UGTT INDEPENDENCE CANNOT BE BROKEN EVEN BY THE USE OF ARMED FORCES, AND THAT UGTT WILL NEVER ACCEPT THAT CIRCUMSTANCES MIGHT BE USED TO CHANGE ITS IMMUTABLE PRINCIPLES.

6. RELIABLE JOURNALISTIC SOURCE WHO WAS PRESENT WHEN

COMMUNIQUE WAS ISSUED TELLS US THAT ACHOUR'S SON
THAMEUR PREDICTED IN PRIVATE CONVERSATION THAT OUTCOME
OF COUNCIL MEETING WILL BE CALL FOR TOTAL UGTT BREAK WITH
PARTY AND CREATION OF NEW "LABOR PARTY" AS RIVAL TO PSD.

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PAGE 01 TUNIS 00158 02 OF 02 091728Z
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 TUNIS 0158

7. COMMENT. UGTT NOW APPEARS HELL BENT ON MOVING INTO
OPEN CONFRONTATION WITH GOVERNMENT. IF THAMEUR ACHOLYQYS
PREDICTION ABOUT A TOTAL SPLIT WITH PARTY AND ORGANIZATION
OF RIVAL LABOR PARTY ARE BORNE OUT, GOVERNMENT AND PARTY
WILL BE FORCED TO REACT TO CHALLENGE. WHAT THIS REACTION
WILL BE WE CANNOT SAY, AND IT MAY BE THAT GOVERNMENT AND
PARTY THEMSELVES HAVE NOT COME TO FIRM CONCLUSIONS. PARTY
HAS SPOKEN IN PAST ABOUT FORMATION OF RIVAL LABOR
CONFEDERATION AND WE UNDERSTAND SUCH AN ORGANIZATION,
THE MOVEMENT OF TUNISIAN WORKERS (MTT), ALREADY EXISTS
(ON PAPER) AND THAT IT REQUESTED GOVERNMENT RECOGNITION
A COUPLE OF MONTHS AGO. (WE ARE NOT AWARE THAT ANY ACTION
WAS TAKEN ON THIS REQUEST NOR THAT THE MTT COMMANDS ANY
SIGNIFICANT FOLLOWING AMONG ORGANIZED LABOR.)

8. THE REGIME MAY ALSO BE CONTEMPLATING STRONGER ACTION
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PAGE 02 TUNIS 00158 02 OF 02 091728Z

AGAINST ACHOUR. IN AFTERMATH OF RECENT GOVERNMENT SHAKEUP, REPORTS ARE BEGINING TO CIRCULATE ABOUT A MASMOUDI-ENGINEERED DEAL BETWEEN ACHOUR AND QADHAFI, ALSO INVILVING OTHER PEOPLE. FIRST PUBLIC HINT OF THIS WAS A LE MONDE ARTICLE JAN 6 CONCERNING SOME SORT OF UGTT-LIBYAN ANTI-SADAT ACCORD, WHICH WAS ALSO REPORTED IN INDEPENDENT TUNISIAN DAILY LE TEMPS ON JANUARY 7. (FULL DETAILS ON THIS TWIST ARE NOT YET AVAILABLE, BUT WE WILL REPORT AS MORE INFORMATION BECOMES AVAILABLE.)

9. COMMUNIQUE IS ALSO SIGNIFICANT IN THAT UGTT HAS PUBLICLY ANNOUNCED INTENTION TO SET UP FORMAL ORGANIZATIONS "REPRESENTING TUNISIAN LABORERS" ABROAD IN LIBYA, FRG AND FRANCE. REGIME HAS ALWAYS OPPOSED SUCH EXPANSION OF UGTT POWER BASE FOR OBVIOUS REASONS. COMMUNIQUE'S DECLARATION OF FREEDOM OF ACTION, DOMESTICALLY AS WELL AS INTERNATIONALLY, WILL SURELY BE VIEWED AS ONE MORE PROVOCATION.

10. ACHOUR'S ANNOUNCEMENT OF READINESS TO QUIT THE POLITICAL BUREAU MUST BE TAKEN SERIOUSLY. NOTWITHSTANDING HIS PROTESTATIONS TO THE CONTRARY, IT IS A DECLARATION OF OPEN REBELLION IN TERMS OF TUNISIAN POLITICS. HIS ANNOUNCEMENT THAT HE IS WILLING TO ACCEPT SUPPORTN MORE OR LESS WHENEVER OR WHEREEVER IT COMES, ONLY ADDS TO THIS CONCLUSION. ALTHOUGH ACHOUR'S ACTIONS PROBABLY PREEMPTED THE PSD COMMITTEE, SCHEDULED TO MEET IN EXTRAORDINARY SESSION ON JANUARY 20, FROM THROWING OIS OUT OF THE PARTY FIRST, QUESTION OF WHO TOOK THIS STEP FIRST IS ALMOST IRRELEVANT. THE ESSENTIAL ELEMENT IS THAT ACHOUR'S BRIDGES, WHICH HE HAS SO FREQUENTLY CROSSED AND RECROSSED IN THE PAST, NOW SEEM ON THE VERGE OF BEING BROKEN. THIS MAY BE THE "CLARIFICATION" THAT ACHOUR'S BASE HAS SUPPOSEDLY BEEN DEMANDING.

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PAGE 03 TUNIS 00158 02 OF 02 091728Z

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